

Water Level Management Update

Volume 7, Issue 2

December 2004

Strong Support for Pool 5 Drawdown

Meetings were held on Sept. 22, 2004, at Wabasha High School (Minnesota), and on September 23, 2004, at Cochrane/Fountain City High School (Wisconsin), to obtain public input on a proposed drawdown of Pool 5.

Approximately 20 individuals attended the Wabasha meeting, and 27 attended the Fountain City meeting. Comments were positive regarding moving forward with a proposal to conduct a drawdown between 1.5-2.5 feet during the summer of 2005.

During the public meetings, there were presenta-

tions on results from the Pool 8 drawdown, an update on the Spring Lake Islands Habitat Restoration Project, a report from the Citizens Advisory Committee and an overview of the planned Pool 5 drawdown. Public comments were unanimously in support of the drawdown, with most individuals who specified a drawdown level recommending a drawdown level of at least 2-foot.

Other comments included support for a proposed new boat ramp at the upper end of West Newton Chute and the need to do drawdowns on a regular basis in a given pool.

River Resources Forum Recommends a 2.0-foot Drawdown of Pool 5

The River Resources Forum (RRF), a State and Federal interagency advisory group on Upper Mississippi River resource management policies, issues, and activities, has endorsed a drawdown level of 2.0-foot for the Pool 5 drawdown, planned for the summer of 2005. After a lively discussion at the Forum meeting on December 8, 2004, the 2.0-foot level was unanimously endorsed.

The Forum endorsement states:

“The RRF endorses a drawdown in Pool 5 during 2005, or the earliest year possible, to implement the drawdown, with a preferred level of 2.0-foot. Funding for supplemental dredging will be pursued to implement a 2-foot drawdown, but a minimum level will be 1.5-foot. The RRF also endorses the concept of a drawdown in the year following the initial drawdown. RRF agencies will assign staff to participate

in a Task Force to address permanent placement of material at the Lost Island and Fisher Island placement sites.”

Prior to the Forum’s action, the Water Level Management Task Force had developed the following position: “The task force strongly recommends at least a 2-foot drawdown in Pool 5, preferably a 2.5-foot drawdown, for the summer of 2005. At this time the Task Force understands that the Corps of Engineers has funding and can justify a 1.5-foot drawdown with Operation and Maintenance money. The Task Force requests the River Resources Forum seek additional funds of approximately \$265,000 to \$650,000 for environmental main channel dredging (2-foot and 2.5-foot drawdowns, respectively). The Task Force has both confirmed and verbal commitments for the money needed for recreational access dredging during the drawdown.”

Citizen Advisory Committee Identifies Recreational Access Sites for Pool 5 Drawdown

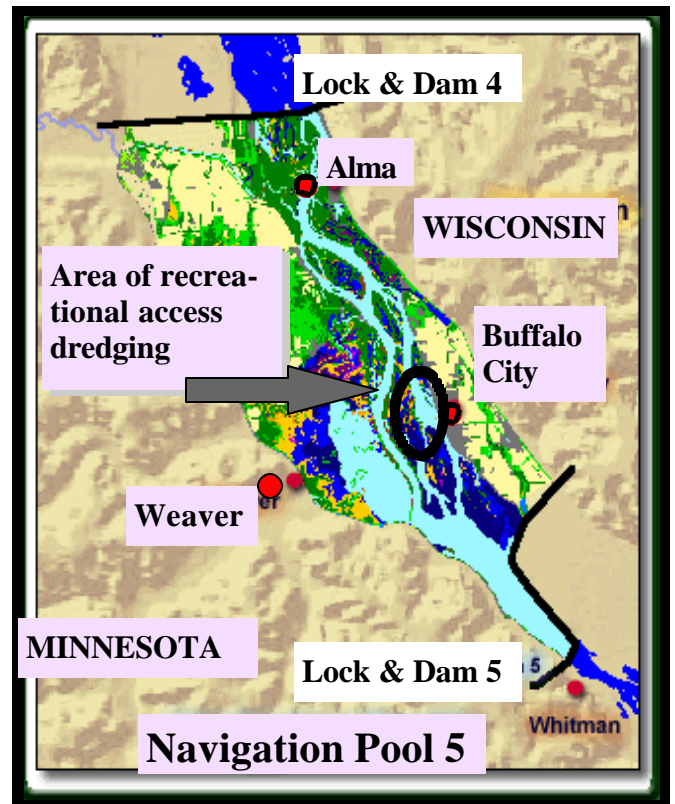
A Citizens Advisory Committee has identified recreational access needs in anticipation of a Pool 5 drawdown. During public input meetings last fall, citizens supported a Pool 5 drawdown as long as some “reasonable” level of public access could be provided. A citizens committee was formed to address this issue, and provided the Water Level Management Task Force with a map showing areas commonly used by recreational boaters that would be affected by a drawdown and that might need additional dredging. All of the areas identified are channels typically used to get from public boat accesses to the main river channel

The Water Level Management Task Force used the map to estimate dredging quantities and costs. Three sites were identified as needing dredging, and alternative solutions to dredging (moving temporary docks or developing a new access) were identified for two additional sites. Sites needing to be dredged are near Murphy’s Cut by Halfmoon Landing on the Minnesota side, and at two locations in Belvidere Slough on the Wisconsin side.

Total cost to dredge these sites under a 2-foot drawdown scenario is approximately \$37,000 and under a 2.5-foot drawdown the cost would be \$55,000. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MI DNR), and possibly The Nature Conservancy and Audubon are seeking these funds. Local governments and other organizations would be welcomed as partners in this effort.

The goal of the task force is to improve fish and wildlife habitat. Dredging would not be completed

to improve recreational access, but to mitigate for impacts as a result of the drawdown. All dredging would need to be completed prior to the drawdown.



Nine Years of Action for the Water Level Management Task Force

The Water Level Management Task Force was formed in 1995 to supplement on-going river restoration activities by working with the river's water flow and levels to increase restoration activities. By 1996, the task force decided that three actions had high benefits and low cost.

First on the list, ask the Corps of Engineers to operate the water levels at the high end of the operation band, during the winter. Simply put, the water levels would be 4-6 inches higher than in the past winter months, providing additional backwater

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

habitat during the difficult winter months for numerous species but primarily the sunfish family, bluegill, crappie and largemouth bass. This change has remained in place since 1996.

Next the task force embarked on a tougher goal of reestablishing aquatic vegetation by mimicking more natural water levels during the summer months. In the first stage, we tested our theory in small backwater areas by blocking off the openings with sandbags and pumping the water out. This activity improved aquatic vegetation in the three demonstration areas by increasing the number of plant species and the density of those plants. These became known as the small-scale drawdown and provided the impetus to move to large-scale drawdown.

In 1998, the task force decided that four of the 10 pools in the St. Paul District would be good candidates for the first large-scale demonstration drawdown. The public was asked their opinion on the topic and Pool 8, located on the banks of La Crosse, Wisc., came out as the prime choice. By working with the public the task force was able to draw Pool 8 down by 1-1/2 feet during the summer of 2001 and 2002. Visually, the response of aquatic vegetation was dramatic and research documented that 51 percent of exposed mud flats were covered by dense vegetation.

Now, the question remains: "How long will the vegetation persist?" Muskrats, swans and impounded water levels all seem to have an affect on the plants. Follow-up monitoring will help determine the answer to the question.

The task force has not stopped with the first major success. They worked to conduct minor drawdowns (1 foot or less) on Pools 6 and 9. After disappointments for two years in a row, the task force decided that regardless of the depth of drawdown, minor to major, a significant amount of planning is necessary to move forward with the actual implementation.

Today, a major drawdown in Pool 5 is scheduled for next year, 2005. You can see by the articles in this newsletter that most of the issues are resolved and the task force should be able to implement another drawdown to restore aquatic vegetation in Pool 5, next year.

To date, this work has been done without a funding program in place. The federal and state governments have pooled resources of staff and money to accomplish the goals of the task force. We have been quite successful but the constant scramble for funding has lead to delays and elimination of some projects. In the future, finding permanent funding will be a major effort for the program.

Potential Funding for Water Level Management

After more than a decade of study, the Upper Mississippi River – Illinois Waterway System Feasibility Study has been completed. The recommended plan includes a 50-year framework for a \$5.3 billion ecosystem restoration plan and a 50-year framework for a \$2.4 billion navigation efficiency improvement plan.

Water level management is included as an important management action in the recommended ecosystem restoration plan. The feasibility report states "...modified dam operations for environmental benefits include lowering water levels

(drawdowns), changing flow distribution through dam gates, minimizing water level fluctuations and changing control points." Water level management actions are proposed for all three UMR Corps districts (St. Paul, Rock Island and St. Louis).

If Congress authorizes and appropriates money for the plan, funding would be available for numerous ecosystem restoration techniques, including water level management. Twelve of the potential 33 pools on the Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway would be funded for regular drawdowns to re-

(Continued on page 4)

**Water Level Mgmt Update
Mr. Jeff DeZellar
USACE- St. Paul District
190 Fifth Street East
St. Paul, MN 55101-1638**

(Continued from page 3)

store and maintain aquatic vegetation on the river.

The funding would be used to dredge the main channel and recreational access channels during the draw-down.

In the St. Paul District, Pools 5, 7, 8 and 9 are identified as higher priority locations for pool scale draw-downs, but other pools may be considered as the eco-

system restoration program is adaptively managed.

A detailed technical report entitled "Water Level Management Opportunities on the UMR-IWW System, July 2004 can be accessed at <http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns>, then click on "Restructured UMR-IWW System Navigation Study," then on "Reports."

Contact the following people if you have questions or comments:

Gretchen Benjamin

WI Dept. of Natural Resources
3550 Mormon Coulee Road
La Crosse, WI 54601
(608) 785-9982

Tim Schlagenhaft

MN Dept. of Natural Resources
1801 South Oak Street
Lake City, MN 55041
(651) 345-3365

Jeff DeZellar

US Army Corps of Engineers – St. Paul Dist
190 Fifth Street East
St. Paul, MN 55101- 1638
(651)290-5433

Don Hultman

Upper Mississippi Refuge Complex Manager
US Fish and Wildlife Service
54 East Fourth Street
Winona, MN 55987
(507) 494-6218